

## **PLENARY LECTURE “SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL SCIENCES”**

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Title: “A Sociological Perspective on Today Anti-Semitism and Strategies of confrontation”

Xenophobia, racism, stereotypes, discrimination and antisemitism are all notions that point out to kinds of discrimination in inter-group relations. Antisemitism is special. Its history is endless. Bauman (1998) and Sandauer (quoted Cheyette 1993) speak of allo-Semitism and assess that Jews have always been the target of singular – mostly hostile – attitudes of the public and the authorities. Whatever they did, they were the epitome of incongruity: a non-national nation. This antisemitism – a term invented by Wilhelm Marr (1897) -, states that wherever they are Jews aspire to control society (Krefetz 1984). The worst episode of anti-Jewishness, the Shoah, does not need reminding (Hilberg 2006). What happened after WWII in the Soviet empire was not enviable either (Slezkine 2006). Though, in recent decades, efforts like *Vatican II* (in 1965) aimed at appeasing Jewish-Christian relations.

Today antisemitism is again on the rise, not only out of racism and nationalism like in past decades, but, paradoxically, of anti-racism and anti-nationalism (Taguieff 2013; Kantor 2011). It equals Zionism and racism, denies Holocaust, adopts third-worldist slogans and associates Jews and Israel to racism, imperialism and colonialism (Fishel 2015). It demonizes Israel’s “oppression of innocent victims”, the Palestinians, and its stigma amalgamates Jews and Israel. In the diaspora, it targets the Jews who, presumably, are all supporters of Israel and its crimes (Hirsh 2007).

In the background there is the Muslims’ becoming an important minority in many countries that conveys judeophobia drawing from its ethno-religious support of the Palestinian cause. A support which some milieus associate with a “sacred” Islamist radical war against “heretics” from all boards (Mark 2003). More broadly, the pro-Palestinian atmosphere propagated by Muslim hostility attracts intellectuals and media people sensitive to third-world causes, and these trends rejoin *de facto* the antisemitism upheld by radical rightists.

In the past, Jewish self-loathing has been a reaction of some prominent individuals to antisemitism (Lessing 2001); it led to identification with the antisemite, even to suicide. Conversion to Christianity or embracing universalistic ideologies have been a pattern to escape or fight against antisemitism; another has been Zionism, i.e. building a Jewish national home. Yet, today, most Jews still find significance in their Jewishness where they live (Cohen 2002). This, however, requests elaborating appropriate strategies to live with, if not to overcome, antisemitism. We think of three possible courses that can be followed simultaneously by: (1) creating structures of communication with – *a priori* hostile- publics open to dialogue, (2) empowering Jewish bodies and strengthening the cohesion of communities, (3) developing legal and political arms able to fight back in court and in public, (4) building institutions and museums to honor Jewish history, its suffering and its part in the making of the world. All these request

firstly downplaying internal rifts and rivalries among the diverse forces at work among Jews, and asserting “kol Yisrael haverim”.

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